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A CHARGE

TO THE CLERGY AND CHURCHWARDENS OF
THE ARCHDEACONRY,

DELIVERED BY

EDWIN PALMER, D.D.,

ARCHDEACON OF OXFORD,

At his Visitation in April and May, 1894.



James Parker and Co.

27 BROAD-STREET, OXFORD;

AND 6 SOUTHAMPTON-STREET, STRAND, LONDON.

1894.

PRINTED BY JAMES PARKER AND CO.,
CROWN YARD, OXFORD.

My Brethren of the Clergy and of the Laity,

I DESIRE, at the outset of this Address, to acknowledge gratefully the response of the Clergy to the Statistical Inquiries which have been addressed to them by the Convocations of Canterbury and York. So far as I can see, there are only eight parishes in the whole Archdeaconry of Oxford from which no returns were received by the Editor last year. Our thanks are due to Mr. Parker for kindly giving us useful summaries of these returns in the Diocesan Calendar. I desire, also, to acknowledge gratefully that the number of parishes which have sent contributions in answer to the Bishop's Pastoral Letters has been steadily increasing. I may mention that the Spiritual Help Society received from this source £1,220 in 1891, the Diocesan Board of Education, £1,160 in 1892, the Church Building Society, £1,176 in 1893. This year I hope the Spiritual Help Society will find itself as liberally supported as it was three years ago. Will my brethren of the clergy pardon me if I add that I could wish they would preach sermons as well as make collections when they receive these Pastoral Letters? We still hear frequently at the Quarterly Meetings of the Diocesan Board that many people, who are Church-goers and are willing to give to objects which they understand, know very little about the Societies in whose interest the Bishop writes.

I am bound to acknowledge, when I am returning thanks for the liberality with which good works are supported, that we live in times which tell upon all incomes that are, directly or indirectly, derived from land. Especially am I bound to acknowledge this when I am compelled to call attention once more to a need which has been a pressing need for the last two years, and is not less pressing now. I mean the need of increased support for our Church Schools.

We have heard in all directions within the last two years of increased demands upon our School Managers, demands for class-rooms, cloak-rooms, porches, offices, ventilation, light, playgrounds. I am not myself inclined to trace this multiplication of requirements to a hostile policy. I do not believe that it originates in a desire to starve out Church Schools and compel them (if I may so say) to "go upon the parish"—in other words to transform themselves into Board Schools which are supported by the rates. I think it is rather to be traced to increased interest in education, and increased study of the laws of health. If some of the requirements of which we have lately heard appear to be unreasonable, I am inclined to attribute such requirements to an excess of zeal on the part of inspectors, which leads them sometimes to confound things desirable in themselves and things absolutely indispensable. Take the article of playgrounds for example. It seems, at first sight, desirable enough that every School

should have a playground,—and, if it is a mixed School, two playgrounds, one for boys, and one for girls. But there are many country places where open ground in the immediate neighbourhood of the school is a more wholesome playground than an enclosed yard could be, and there are many town Schools which would have to be transferred to other sites before space for a playground could possibly be obtained—to say nothing about the costliness of land in towns. I would advise the Managers of Schools, when requirements are threatened which to the best of their judgment are unreasonable, not to assume that the things suggested must be done, until they have laid their case before the Department in London, and have obtained from that Department a final decision upon it. As a matter of fact, however, most of the things demanded from School Managers are things which are really desirable; many of them are things absolutely necessary. Increased space has come to be needed in some places through the growth of the population, in others through the introduction of infants at a lower age than heretofore. Offices, indispensable alike for health and for decency, must be from time to time a considerable source of expense. Ventilation and light can hardly be regarded as luxuries. I have said nothing about an efficient staff of teachers, because that is a point on which it is the plain duty of the Department to insist as a condition of its grants. It is necessary for us to keep our

Schools up to the mark in these respects, if we wish to keep them at all.

Why do we wish to keep them? I know one reason only, but that reason is a cogent one. Secular education is provided in Board Schools and paid for out of the rates, but religious education, properly so called, is not provided in them, although School Boards are allowed to do something in this direction. The law actually forbids the use in Board Schools of all distinctive formularies. How far this prohibition extends is matter of dispute: but it is certain that it excludes the Church Catechism, and all documents analogous to it, to whatever denomination they may belong. This exclusion deprives parents of all security that children who are sent to Board Schools will be brought up in their religion, however much they may desire it. If children are taught religion in a Board School at all, it will either be a colourless thing which can satisfy no one who owns a definite creed, or it will be the religion of the principal teacher in the particular school to which the children go. If that teacher has a definite religious belief, he will for the most part communicate it—intentionally or unintentionally—to his scholars. A Church of England teacher will teach the religion of the Church; a Roman Catholic, a Presbyterian, a Baptist, a Congregationalist, a Wesleyan, will teach his own system; a Unitarian or a Jew the same. If the teacher is an unbeliever or an agnostic, he will

almost inevitably prejudice his scholars against every definite form of religious belief; if, on the other hand, the principal teacher, whatever be his own persuasion, endeavours to carry out rigidly the principle which seems to underlie the prohibition of distinctive formularies, he will teach nothing positive, but will leave his scholars' minds a blank on religious subjects. How any man who values the Christian faith can be satisfied with such a system, it is not easy to see. If it works tolerably (as it sometimes does), it can only do so because the teachers in Board Schools are for the most part Christians of some denomination or other, and do not greatly trouble themselves about the principle on which the prohibition of distinctive formularies is based. A Churchman cannot but desire to be assured that the teachers of his children are themselves members of the Church, and are not forbidden to use the means which an experience as old as Christianity has shown to be the best means of handing on from one generation to another the faith of the Church,—instruction based on formularies and summarised in them.

Board Schools, however, are not forced upon us. The law enables Church people to secure a Church education for their children, if they are willing to defray an appreciable part of the cost. Denominational schools are recognised as part of the educational machinery of the country, and are very largely assisted by grants from the public purse.

The only conditions of this assistance are that they shall not force the religious education which they give on children whose parents object to it, and that the efficiency of their secular teaching and the sufficiency of their buildings and plant shall be certified by Government inspectors. This is an arrangement for which we have much cause to be thankful. If its conditions sometimes prove onerous, it is, nevertheless, well worth our while to fulfil them. During the last two years, as I have said, they have proved onerous. There has been a much greater call for expenditure on our Schools than there had been for some years before. It is this which has produced the frequent appeals for money of which the Diocese has heard so much. Meetings have been held at Reading, at Maidenhead, and at Oxford, at which our leading laymen have come forward to emphasize the need of increased contributions to our educational funds. The Bishop (I may remind you) showed his foresight by initiating two years ago what he called an Emergency Fund for this purpose, and he started it with a contribution of £500 from himself. This year he has given to it £200 more. Others also have made liberal donations, though it hardly seems as if the Diocese had even yet fully realised the magnitude of the crisis. I thankfully acknowledge the liberal provision which rich men often make for the wants, educational and other, of the places in which their property lies, or in which they

reside. But it should always be remembered that there are many places in which wants are large, and local resources small. For those places, especially, the existence of general funds, like the fund of the Diocesan Board of Education and the Bishop's Emergency Fund, is most important. Such Funds cannot indeed take the whole burden off the shoulders of poor places, but they can often give help of sufficient magnitude to encourage friends and neighbours who might otherwise have been daunted by the seeming impossibility of the task before them. We make bold, therefore, to urge upon you again and again the need for constant and strenuous exertion, in order to keep our Church Schools alive. It is a struggle in which we can only succeed by constant and strenuous exertion.

Plausible arguments are not wanting for abandoning this struggle. The commonest and most plausible is, that for Board Schools all have to pay alike; the burden does not fall on the willing horse only. Men point sometimes to rich people who give little or nothing; sometimes to great trading Companies, such as the railways, which (for whatever reason) do not contribute at all. It is worth while, they say, to turn our Voluntary Schools into Board Schools if it were only that the wealth which now goes untaxed may be compelled to pay its share. It might be worth while if the difference between a Board School and a Church School was of small consequence. But

to Churchmen it is a momentous difference. It is essential for us to be assured that our children will be brought up in the faith of Christ. Such an assurance a Board School does not give us.

I turn to a very different subject. The chief outcome of the last Session of Parliament has been an Act of great length and of great importance—the Local Government Act, 1894. On the general principles of this Act there has been a considerable amount of agreement for some years past between the two great parties in the State, whatever differences of opinion may have emerged when those principles came to be worked out. It is not my business here to discuss this Act at length. But there is one part of it which is of special interest to the majority of those who are brought together by Visitations—the parish clergy and the churchwardens of the rural parishes.

I will take the case of the Churchwardens first. The Act purports to divest them of all rights, powers, and obligations, which do not concern the affairs of the Church or ecclesiastical charities. They are no longer to be overseers. They are no longer to be trustees of any property which is not connected with the affairs of the Church, or held for an ecclesiastical charity. They are no longer to be managers of parish charities that are not ecclesiastical. They will continue, however, to be trustees of School sites, and managers of Schools, in all cases in which they are constituted

trustees or managers by the trust deeds, because Section 66 of the Act expressly provides that "Nothing in this Act shall affect the trusteeship, management, or control of any elementary School." Nor will they cease, it would seem, to be trustees of non-ecclesiastical charities until the expiration of forty years from the date of the foundation of such charities. Of course the Act does not forbid a man who holds the office of churchwarden to be appointed an overseer or to be elected a trustee of a parochial charity by the parish council—or, if there be no parish council, by the parish meeting. He is not to be disqualified for such functions because he is a churchwarden ; although the fact that he is a churchwarden will no longer vest such functions in him. With the powers, duties, and liabilities of churchwardens, so far as they relate to the affairs of the Church or ecclesiastical charities, the Act does not interfere at all save in the case of closed churchyards. If the churchwardens, after the passing of this Act, give a certificate, as in the Burials Act, 1855 (18 and 19 Vict. c. 128), provided, in order to obtain the repayment out of the poor rate of expenses incurred for the maintenance and repair of a closed churchyard, the obligations of the churchwardens with respect to such maintenance and repair are to be transferred to the Parish Council. But no such transfer will take place if the Churchwardens do not, after the passing of this Act, come upon the poor rate for such expenses.

The Act deals with rural Vestries in much the same way in which it deals with rural Churchwardens. Any powers, duties, and liabilities which these Vestries may possess with regard to the affairs of the Church or to ecclesiastical charities, it leaves untouched; but for all other purposes it transfers the powers, duties, and liabilities of the Vestry to the Parish Council, and in parishes which have no Council to the Parish Meeting.

I have spoken of the Act as affecting the parish clergy also. It does affect them, though it hardly ever names them. In cases of parish charities, which, though not ecclesiastical, are at present vested in the clergyman and churchwardens or overseers, the Act does not displace the clergyman from his trusteeship, but it gives him for co-trustees members of the Parish Council, or persons elected by the Parish Council or the Parish Meeting, instead of the parish officers. Another provision says that "if the governing body of any parochial charity does not contain persons elected by the ratepayers or parochial electors, or inhabitants of the parish, the Parish Council may appoint additional members of that governing body, not exceeding the number allowed by the Charity Commissioners in each case. Another provision says that "if the management of any such charity is vested in a sole trustee, the number of trustees may, with the approval of the Charity Commissioners, be increased to three, one of

whom may be nominated by such sole trustee, and one by the Parish Council or Parish Meeting." Many parish charities, which are not ecclesiastical charities (as the term is defined in this Act), have been established in past years by parish clergymen or their relations and friends, and have naturally been placed in the charge of the clergyman, or the churchwardens, or both together. Many parish charities founded by lay-people, who had no special connexion with parish clergymen, have been similarly vested. In consequence of such arrangements the clergyman of the parish has generally exercised considerable influence in the management of parish charities. Indeed, when he was not sole trustee, his co-trustees have not unfrequently devolved the sole management upon him. The effect of the present Act will be to diminish his influence in such matters greatly. I do not myself think that he will be a loser by the change. Certainly he will be saved trouble ; but I do not count this as gain : a clergyman ought not to shrink from trouble when the welfare of his people, whether spiritual or temporal, is concerned. But it will be a gain to him that he is relieved of an invidious responsibility, and that wild suspicions of malversation are precluded. I have myself known strange instances of such suspicions. It might seem, no doubt, a hardship if the management of institutions, of which the clergyman or his family had defrayed the cost, were to be taken out of his hands. But there are provisions in the

Act, at which I have already glanced, which will make such a hardship comparatively rare. I mean the provisions which allow the wishes of those who have founded parish charities to retain their force for forty years from the date of the foundation.

I have tried to summarise accurately the changes introduced directly or indirectly by the Local Government Act into the position of rural vestries, churchwardens, and clergymen; but I must hope for an indulgent judgment from those who hear me. It is not always as clear as could be wished, and I do not pretend to legal knowledge or experience in the construction of Statutes. The framers of the Act were not unaware themselves that questions might arise upon its construction, and they have wisely provided a machinery for the decision of such questions. I do not doubt that this machinery will be put in motion again and again before we all know exactly how we stand. Meantime the general intention of the Act is undoubtedly to strip the rural vestries and churchwardens of what I will venture to call their secular attributes, and to put (as far as possible) the management of all parochial charities that are not ecclesiastical into the hands of the parishioners or the Parish Councils which they are to elect. The precise date at which these changes will take place is not yet determined; but they cannot take effect before November in the present year.

Legislation of a very different kind is proposed

which I am unable to leave unnoticed. In the Queen's Speech which was read to the two Houses of Parliament on the 12th of March these words occurred: "Measures will be laid before you dealing with the Ecclesiastical Establishments in Wales and Scotland." So far as Wales is concerned, a Bill has been brought in already. How the Establishment in Scotland is to be dealt with we have not yet been told officially. These facts are facts of the utmost gravity. Even if nothing had been said by politicians outside the walls of Parliament about the Disestablishment of the Church in England, no one could fail to see that, if the measures already announced should become law, they would inevitably be followed by an attack upon the Church in England. But I do not wish to enlarge upon this danger. It is our duty, in my judgment, to contend against Disestablishment in Wales and in Scotland, whether we do or do not believe that it would bring Disestablishment nearer to ourselves. Nine years ago I devoted a Visitation Address to the subject of Disestablishment. I do not intend to travel over all the ground again. But the present importance of the subject compels me to touch upon it.

Disestablishment, as it is commonly understood, embraces two things, both of which find place in the Bill which is now before the House of Commons. The first of these is the withdrawal of all special privileges from the religious body

which is disestablished, the second is the confiscation of its funds and the appropriation of those funds to other uses.

With regard to special privileges, it is not necessary for me to enumerate the privileges which the Established Church alike in England and in Wales enjoys. The most important of them is that every Bishop, every Cathedral Chapter, every Rector or Vicar of a parish, is in the eye of the law a corporation, capable of holding property, and transmitting it to his or their official successors without the cumbrous machinery of trusts. A more conspicuous but far less important privilege is the place which the Bishops, or at all events a fixed number of them, have in the House of Lords. If these and all other privileges (strictly so called) were taken away, it would be reasonable to expect that the control by the State of appointments to Bishoprics, of Church legislation, and of Church discipline, would cease. Whether, so far as the Church is concerned, the loss of such privileges as I have mentioned (were that all which Disestablishment involved) would or would not be compensated by the withdrawal of State control, is a point upon which Churchmen differ. For my own part I do not think that it would.

But Disestablishment means (as I have said already) in the public mouth, and in Parliament, and in the Welsh Bill which has just been introduced, more than this: it means, besides all this, disendowment. What is disendowment? It is

nothing else than the confiscation of the whole capital (if I may use the expression) of the religious body which is disendowed, the confiscation of property which has been devoted for many centuries to the maintenance of religious worship and teaching, and its transference to other uses. Objection has been taken to the employment of the word confiscation. Some men, apparently, would confine this word to the appropriation by the State of property belonging to individuals or to families. The property in question does not belong to individuals, or to private families, but to a great religious body. I use this last phrase deliberately. The fact that in a legal and technical sense this property is vested in a multitude of corporations, sole or aggregate, and not in one great corporation known to the law as the Church of England and Wales, makes no real difference. This property has grown out of innumerable gifts made at different times, and by people of different ranks, for one common purpose—the perpetuation of God's worship and of religious teaching in our land. These gifts were sanctioned by the law when they were made, and for many centuries the law has secured their application to that purpose. The only sense in which this property is national property is that those who gave it believed themselves to be providing for the highest interests of the nation. No individual, no corporation, can set up any shadow of title to it against the corporations which hold it now. It

cannot be taken away from them by any process of law. It can be touched only by an act of the National Legislature, of which the power, of course, in matters of property, as in matters of life and liberty, is irresistible. It is now proposed that in Wales and in Scotland this property shall be transferred from the service of religion to other uses. The uses which have been named are good uses undeniably. But their goodness does not justify the diversion to them of property which was given originally, and is actually employed, for uses still better. Under special circumstances, no doubt, great churches have been employed for a time as hospitals, and the emergency has justified the measure. But it would be a very different thing if a new hospital were wanted in any place, and it were proposed to convert the church permanently into a hospital, and leave the congregation to provide themselves with another church as best they might. In the present instance there is no plea of necessity available for the diversion to the good uses which have been named of the Church property in Wales. But if there be no necessity, it is reasonable to ask in whose interest such an operation can be performed. There is, I am convinced, but one set of people who have a real interest in such an operation,—namely, secularists pure and simple; men who think that belief in God and in a future life is a mere delusion which tends to distract people from the only affairs in which they have

a real concern,—the affairs of their present life on earth. But such men, thank God, are not very numerous in any part of our island ; nor am I by any means sure that it would be fair to look upon them as the prime authors of this movement. It cannot be doubted that many of those who are most eager for Disestablishment believe in God and in a life beyond the grave, although it is very hard to understand how such people can think it a good thing to transfer to secular uses property which is at present used for purposes of religion. It would be intelligible that a Nonconformist community which believed itself to be more numerous than the Church in Wales should desire to see the endowments of the Church transferred in whole or in part to itself : but that any Christian community should seek to diminish the resources of the Church without adding to its own is unintelligible. I may illustrate my position by reference to the case of Scotland. We who are here are not Presbyterians. The Establishment in Scotland is Presbyterian. The Christian body in Scotland, with which we are in full communion, is known by the name of the Scottish Episcopal Church. This in the eyes of the Scotch Establishment is a Nonconformist body : it is a voluntary community, which was at one time persecuted by the State, and is still entirely without any other State recognition than such as Nonconformists in England and Wales enjoy. Yet we Churchmen cannot feel that we

have an interest—I for one certainly cannot feel that I have an interest—in the disendowment of the Scotch Establishment : on the contrary, we should be heartily sorry to see one penny taken from it and devoted to other objects, however good, which were not connected with the service of religion. There have been times, no doubt, in which a narrow sectarianism has persuaded itself that the differences between one form of Christian belief and worship and another were more important than the difference between Christianity and heathenism, or the difference between virtue and vice. There have been times in which people have thought that others who called themselves Christians but did not share their own particular belief and form of worship ought to be put to death or banished from the country. The modern advocates of disestablishment would deem it an insult if such views were attributed to them. But what intelligible motive remains? Does any man in Scotland or in Wales or in England really believe that the cause of religion would be advanced by the confiscation of religious endowments—old or new? I cannot bring myself to think that such a belief is entertained—except it be by a few theorists who profess to regard the existence of endowments as mischievous to any religious body which possesses them. Facts show that this is not the theory of Nonconformist bodies in England or Wales. They have usually property of some sort or other secured by trusts

of various kinds. Acts of Parliament, known by the name of their author, Sir Morton Peto, have been passed during the present reign for the express purpose of facilitating and securing Non-conformist endowments. For my own part, I believe that many advocates of disendowment, whether they call themselves friends or enemies of the Church, have never asked themselves what purpose it is to serve, or what its consequences will be. They do not even seem to remember that the disendowment of a religious body is equivalent to the imposition of an enormous tax upon its members. Still less do they consider that it is a serious blow to religion in the area which it affects. It is an indisputable fact that the endowments of the Church support a vast machinery in England and Wales for the maintenance of religious teaching and religious worship. If they were diverted either in England or in Wales to other uses, this machinery would, for a time at least, be thrown out of gear. I do not doubt the loyalty and liberality of Churchmen; but it would be a simple impossibility for them to make provision at once for the support of so great an army of Christian workers as is at present employed.

I have spoken the more freely on this subject, because there is no reason to apprehend that, if a disendowing Act were passed to-morrow for the Church in England, it would affect personally either myself or any parish incumbent here

present. The English Legislature is usually careful of vested interests. The Bill which is now before Parliament recognises this principle. If it becomes law in its present shape, no Welsh Bishop, no member of a cathedral chapter, no parish incumbent, will cease to enjoy his present stipend so long as he continues to discharge the duties which are attached to his possession of it. But if it were otherwise, no false shame would prevent me from arguing against a measure which seems to me alike unreasonable and injurious to the cause of religion in this country.

I do not, however, wish to be misunderstood. It is in the power of the legislature to cripple, for a time at least, the work of the Church ; it is not in its power to destroy her life. That life does not depend upon her endowments, or upon her recognition by the State. She is older than Parliament, older than the Crown of England : her life is not of human origin. Privileges which kings and parliaments have given, kings and parliaments may take away. Endowments which the law has allowed her to receive, and which it has hitherto secured to her, may be confiscated by an act of the Legislature. But her faith, her sacraments, her ministry, she could lose only by the apostasy of all her children. These are the things which are of vital interest. We must not indeed compliment away any privileges which the Church possesses. These privileges are the symbols and tokens of the profession of Christianity by the

nation. Still less must we affect indifference to schemes of confiscation which would make it harder for us to carry religious teaching and religious worship into every corner of the land. But, whatsoever treatment we may experience from the Legislature, we must above all things hold fast the faith of Christ, with the sacraments which He ordained, and the ministry which has come down to us from His Apostles. No human power can wrest these from us. Their preservation, under God, depends upon ourselves alone.



